



# Vicarious trauma and emotional labour in researching child sexual abuse and child protection: A postdoctoral reflection

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**Michael A. Guerzoni**

## Abstract

Criminology almost inevitably involves the study of sensitive and sorrowful research topics. Consequently, criminologists fall victim to the inherent risks of exposure to vicarious trauma, requiring many to practice emotional labour in the field, in the lecture hall, and perhaps, even along the corridors of the university campus itself. This article offers a reflective account of the experiences of vicarious trauma and the self-imposed, protective practice of emotional labour within doctoral research on child protection initiatives within a religious institution. It explores my experience of self-regulating my emotions in response to the reading of disturbing content, and of the active filtering of points of conversation when asked about my research within professional, familial and social settings, to prevent disturbing the emotions of others. The article encourages potential doctoral students to consider how they might prepare for themselves emotionally, socially and physically, for their inevitable encounter with difficult content, prior to the commencement of candidature, thereby increasing their resilience in facing the difficult components of a doctoral degree tasked with exploring content of a bleak and emotionally unnerving nature.

## Keywords

Emotional labour, criminology, child sexual abuse, vicarious trauma, sensitive research

## Introduction

In its study of crime, victims, and the criminal justice system, the discipline of Criminology almost inevitably leads its students to the examination of distressing content. This is particularly the case within certain sub-specialisations such as the study of child sexual abuse, which involves the reading of court transcripts detailing often graphic accounts of survivor victimisation. Understandably, repetitive exposure to such content can be emotionally taxing for researchers and professionals alike, and when considered longitudinally over the years of doctoral study, could potentially lead to the development of vicarious trauma (Morrison, 2007). This trauma may be exacerbated, or its amelioration hindered, by organisational norms and disciplinary pressures for staff to ‘keep it together’ (see Jewkes, 2012) compelling scholars to ‘bottle up’ what they have read/seen in order to not disturb the peace (Brady, 2017). In other words, the individual employs what Hochschild (2012) refers to as ‘emotional labour’.

This article provides a post-doctoral account of my experiences of emotional labour within, and vicarious trauma

from, their research into child protection in religious organisations. It utilises Hochschild’s (2012) theory to explore how the PhD’s subject matter contributed to my experiences of vicarious trauma and their practicing of emotional labour. Adopting the format of Jackson et al. (2013), the article explores how the emotional labour manifested as both ‘surface acting’ and ‘deep acting’ in situations at the university (colleagues, students) and within broader social settings (acquaintances, family, friends). The article opens with an introduction to the concepts of emotional labour and vicarious trauma, and their presence within specific phases of criminological research. This is followed by a precis of the research, and an application of both concepts to my experiences. Discussion will conclude with some policy directions to aid research institutions address, and forewarn novice

University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS, Australia

### Corresponding author:

Michael A. Guerzoni, School of Social Sciences, University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS 7005, Australia.  
Email: [m.a.guerzoni@utas.edu.au](mailto:m.a.guerzoni@utas.edu.au)



researchers, of the potential risk of vicarious trauma when undertaking sensitive research (see Carl, 2016).

## Emotional labour, vicarious trauma and criminological research

Emotional labour describes the self-regulation of one's emotions and behaviours (body language, facial expressions, vocabulary and vocal tone) in their professional role, primarily to maintain a favourable 'state of mind' in clients with the intent to produce favourable transactions and capital for the organisation (Hochschild, 2012: 7). Emotional labour is typically enacted by an individual when encountering 'difficult' people (e.g. angry customer), troublesome situations (e.g. product theft), ineffectual working conditions (e.g. toxic office culture) and personal hardship (e.g. lack of sleep due to newborn child). As such, emotional labour is commonly observed and required within the caring and service professions, most notably hospitality (Hochschild, 2012), nursing (Theodosius, 2008), medicine (Sorensen and Iedema, 2009), policing (Lumsden and Black, 2018) and religious ministry (Kinman et al., 2011).

According to Hochschild (2012), this emotional and behavioural self-regulation can be undertaken in two ways: (1) 'surface acting', the superficial alteration of expression and behaviours to correlate with managerial expectations or organisational policy (e.g. talking warmly to a rude customer) and (2) 'deep acting', efforts to alter one's very feelings and/or predispositions to more readily conform with external expectations (Brook, 2009; Edgington, 2017; Jackson et al., 2013; Ogbonna and Harris, 2004). Deep acting is more complex and dedicated than surface acting insofar as it involves a cueing of behaviours (e.g. smiling) or emotions (e.g. joy) through the imagining of particular memories or thoughts, for example travelling overseas (Hochschild, 2012). In both instances, Hochschild (2012) argues this produces alienation between the worker and the product of their labour, as the emotions cultivated are not necessarily enjoyed by the worker, nor rewarded by their employer (viz. there is no commission for charisma).

While emotional labour has been examined readily within the aforementioned professions, there is comparatively less scholarship exploring its practice within academic circles, and more specifically, criminological research (Jackson et al., 2013; Jewkes, 2012 – see also this Special Issue). It has been suggested that the absence of discussion of emotional labour and the emotions of criminological research more broadly, can be explained specifically by several interconnected factors: (1) the academic becoming accustomed to criminological work over time which dissuades reflexive practice, (2) reflexive work being seen as a divergence from the central focus of one's work (or indeed what is considered 'important research'), (3) the influence of scholastic training which emphasises a rationalistic and impartial academic *habitus* free from the engagement of emotions, (4) a pressure

to abide by the expectations of benefactors (namely government funding), and (5) a reluctance to be vulnerable among peers and their readership *en masse* (Jewkes, 2012; Jewkes et al., 2016). Furthermore, there has been a resistance against scholarship employing the auto-ethnographic method, likening it to mere 'narcissistic navel-gazing' (see Carl, 2016: 34). With these factors considered, Jewkes (2012) argues that it is a 'disservice' (p. 64) to emerging scholars that more literature is not made more available and documenting the role of emotions and emotional labour within criminological research. Indeed, literature of this nature is useful for enlightening students of the realities of research and the abrogation of misrepresentations, providing insight to the emotional complexity of our work, and thereby, assisting their preparation for the 'road bumps' in the research process and criminological field they undertake to study (Bitsch, 2018; Carl, 2016; Jewkes, 2012; Jewkes et al., 2016: 10).

The term 'vicarious trauma' is used to describe that condition where a third-party is negatively affected and transformed, over time, consequent to having engaged empathetically with the survivors and accounts of trauma (e.g. written or through interviews), while driven at the same time, by a responsibility or commitment to, the provision of assistance, advocacy or support (Pearlman and Caringi, 2009: 202). Although vicarious trauma can, and does, involve the experiencing of psychological symptoms found in direct trauma (e.g. depression, anxiety, avoidance behaviours), it differs to the related secondary traumatic stress disorder insofar as it also entails the alteration of one's 'cognitive schema', that is to say, the ways in which the individual perceives the world around them; including themselves as individuals and other people (Baird and Kracen, 2006; Dunkley and Whelan, 2006; Morrison, 2007: 3). This is typically seen in respect to five areas, including control (e.g. feeling of powerlessness over one's future), esteem (e.g. feeling unclean for reading assault case law), intimacy (e.g. feeling unable to relate to others), safety (e.g. to walk at night alone), and trust (e.g. in men, see Baird and Kracen, 2006; Morrison, 2007: 3). Typically, the shift in the individual's cognitive schema is correlative to the nature of the trauma to which the individual is vicariously exposed (Pearlman and Caringi, 2009). For example, the study of domestic abuse may lead one to doubt marriage to provide a safe and mutually loving union, and therefore, to perceive this relational outcome as something to be avoided.

The presence of vicarious trauma among personnel within the criminal justice system (Burns et al., 2008; Jaffe et al., 2003; Darling and Perez, 2010) and those who work within the context of sexual crimes (Chouliara et al., 2009; Middleton and Potter, 2015; Way et al., 2004) has been noted within the literature as being not an uncommon occurrence. In a similar way, scholarship has explored how academics working in sensitive topic areas (Coles and Mudaly, 2010; Stoler, 2002), particularly among those who interact with survivors of sexual crimes and criminal files vis-à-vis and through documents and reports, suffer from vicarious trauma (Coles et al., 2014;

Fincham et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2013; Moran and Asquith, 2020 – in this Special Issue). Unfortunately, as in my case, the unpreparedness of scholars and PhD candidates to the onset of suffering vicarious trauma is noted as a significant area of need requiring consideration by candidate and supervisors alike (Dominey-Howes, 2015).

## The research context and vicarious trauma

I entered my field of research following experiences of disbelief and emotional upset during my undergraduate legal training when studying statutory defences to sexual crimes. Part of the curricula involved examining cases where defendants sought to merge two legal defences to underage sexual conduct (defence as to age, permitted differences in age between persons) in instances where neither defence was permissible. During this time, there was a government inquiry into sexual crimes against children. Following this inquiry in the press and visual reportage, I was distressed by the secrecy exercised by the Roman Catholic Church in relation to known instances of child sexual abuse. Like many scholars, I entered the field of child protection to contribute to reform in some way, a common causative risk-factor for vicarious trauma (Pearlman and Caringi, 2009; Waters, 2016). At the time, I did not readily comprehend what I was signing up for. My interests were underpinned by a theoretical background of the sociology of organisations, elite theory and the political economy of crime; I entered the field to study organisations, rather than abuse itself. My honours year took this focus on organisations and, consequently, I did little reading on child sexual abuse, focussing more on organisational responses and discourse to instances of church abuse.

This level of exposure to abuse cases changed markedly when I commenced my doctoral candidature that subsequently required me to undertake a detailed literature review of readings on child sexual abuse. The opening months of my first year involved lengthy reading and preparation of a chapter on offenders (viz. theorisation as to causation, offender typologies, infamous cases), victims and victimisation. This material was drawn from the fields of psychology and law, each renowned for their attention to detail and descriptiveness. The psychological literature thoroughly outlined paraphilias (viz. deviant sexual interests, see Cantor and Blanchard, 2012) encountered in child sexual abuse, with accompanying case studies as examples (modus operandi, sexual interests/preferences, crimes committed). The legal material recorded high-profile and infamous abuse cases, with morbidly graphic detail of victimisation. This material was confronting to read, particularly for one who reads slowly. Consequently, for weeks at a time, I would be reading victimisation accounts, offending records and/or of the modus operandi of offenders. I would read of victim suicides and self-harming, offenders dying before their prosecution and conviction, the wilful re-locating of offender priests by

archbishops/bishops (enabling later re-offending), and the silencing of survivors by legal and ecclesial intimidation.

This was grim work. While the writing was presented in a clinical and factual way (as is customary within these fields), I could not read it in such a way; these were accounts of real people being hurt, not a hypothetical case study. The people about whom I was reading experienced serious and profound trauma and pain. These were individuals who had trusted their offenders, and were abhorrently manipulated; compounding in my mind, the overwhelming sadness of the act – these people should have protected the children, not abused them! It was incredibly difficult to read material as confronting as this. My chest would turn to lead, and I would frequently feel queasy and uneasy, a physiological and psychological heaviness that I would carry around like chainmail (Morrison, 2007).

As a consequence of the dark material I was encountering, I found myself questioning whether I possessed the resilience and emotional fortitude to complete my research. There were a number of nights when I left the department at breaking point, and most days were rather dark and bleak. I experienced frequent headaches and several panic attacks across the first year alone. At the same time, I would criticise myself for not handling my emotions better, and would feel guilty for wanting to disperse of the emotional burden of what I had encountered. The thought, ‘you are not a survivor of abuse, they need care and counsel, not *you*’ would at times be present when feeling sorrowful in response to that which I had read (see Dominey-Howes, 2015). However, I was concerned of becoming too ‘cold’ to abuse, and of succumbing to states of emotional disassociation I knew occurred with some professionals working in sensitive lines of work (Darling and Perez, 2010).

Compounded the dismay of reading this material was my repeated uncovering of psychological literature explaining that a majority of child sexual offenders were not criminally motivated by paedophilia or other recurring deviant sexual interests (see Wortley and Smallbone, 2010). While I was aware from my honours year that sexual offenders are a heterogeneous group differing in motivations and victimisation (contrary to popular belief), I was unaware as to the extent to which individuals with paraphilias (particularly paedophilia) were *not* among convicted persons. Several key and well-cited studies in the field argued that the clinical profile and record of offenders, together with a majority not meeting the clinical criteria for paraphilias, demonstrated that a significant number of child molesters were led to criminal decision-making as a consequence of situational precipitators (viz. variables which prompt the surfacing of existing, or otherwise stimulate new, desires), rather than because of an underlying and ongoing attraction to minors (see Smallbone et al., 2011). In other words, the argument is that *anyone* can become a child sexual offender over time, if and when certain situational factors are present.

I wrestled with this for months as, frankly, I did not wish it to be true. It is one thing to accept that there are deviant sexual interests which lead individuals to criminality

(while recognising not all with paraphilias offend, see Richards, 2011). My binary thinking could comprehend the static understanding of sexual abuse, such a framework assisted in the reading and processing of difficult topic content (viz. child offenders are paedophiles so that is why they offend). The suggestion that the potentiality to offend extends to even so-called 'normal' people, however, was horrifying. It tore down my preconceptions and understanding about crime causation, and challenged my very ways of thinking. The issue of child sexual abuse in the church, and society more broadly, then became for me, an even larger and more ominous reality. I remember panicking and dreading in my departmental office when I read the material: acknowledging that child sexual abuse was no longer reserved solely to a select, deviant few, was exceedingly disheartening people I *know* could become child molesters! *People I know could become child molesters!* Persons with whom I had gone to church and university, the clergy I met, my acquaintances and friends, and those in my neighbourhood, all could be potential offenders.

This realisation confounded, confronted and changed me as a person. It coloured how I saw and interacted with people around me. I began to second-guess people who I saw with children at church and in the community, questioning motive, and developed an overly attentive and hyper self-critical assessment of my own approach to physical interactions and gift-giving. Alarm bells would go off in my head when people expressed to me in conversation, their desire to work with children, particularly if they were male (irrespective of the vocation). I would focus intently on tone of voice, body language, and blinking of the eyes when people would discuss matters relating to children. This almost default reflexive 'distrust' of others, in itself was saddening, as I felt guilty periodically for being suspicious and not trusting of others.<sup>1</sup> This guilt was quickly erased, almost legitimised, when remembering the numerous cases I had read where 'trusted' and 'loved' people had ended up being child molesters — affirming the 'stranger is not the danger' trope. Again, my binary way of thinking rendered this difficult to swallow; not everyone would be as they seemed, even if they were perceived as outstanding people in the community. In reading countless stories of church secrecy and clerical mishandling of abuse information, I also began to feel that the organisational church, as a whole, could not be trusted. I questioned whether church denominations and communities actually cared about the Gospel, or instead, were motivated by self-preservation and maintaining the status quo. I began to experience distrust towards clergy and clergy leaders, second-guessing *all* of their motives and behaviours. As a Christian, this was particularly upsetting for me, given that the church and its clergy are key pillars of the faith, and that the ministers I knew were of good reputation and character. My worldview, over time, was slowly being shrouded in darker shades of grey, with optimism and grace replaced by cynicism, suspicion and distrust. At the

very lowest levels, there were periods when I was challenged to question my own faith and all that it represented in and for my reason for being.

I was reluctant to talk to someone about what I had been reading, and particularly a material regarding the broader susceptibility to criminal decision-making and child sexual abuse. I was worried I would be criticised, either in a judgmental way for selecting such a topic to study, or for being a complainer or a 'weak' person if I shared my concerns of how the content troubled me, others might allege that I was covertly criticising my supervisor team (which I am not doing here, as my supervisors were very supportive and I could not have asked for better mentors or support). I was fearful too of being accused of making an indirect personal attack if I talked about the research on situational variables and sexual abuse (viz. thereby insinuating that the person I was talking too were a child molester). On other days, my reluctance to seek out support stemmed from the belief that I did not want to 'bother' people with my problems, which were of my own making (I chose the research topic after all). Even the writing of this article has been difficult, as I do not wish people to misread me or take away a misimpression. I feel the pressure to limit my account ('don't draw attention to yourself'), to not be vulnerable ('this will go into the public domain and may affect your career!') and to not bring any inadvertent dishonour upon my faculty. I felt, and still feel, this pressure to be a rational, lab-coat wearing, article-producing machine and show no weaknesses in my emotional representation.

## The beginning of emotional labour

Several months into my candidature, I started to see the need for regulating what and how I explained my research to friends, family and members of the community. At first, I was excited to share that I was a PhD candidate at our local university, although as I matured over time, this was something I began to dread as I noticed that a lot of people did not take kindly to my choice of research focus. There is no exaggeration here in describing conversations that would *typically* unfold as follows:

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Person: | 'Do you study at university?'   |
| Author: | 'Yes I do, I am presently doing a PhD in Criminology'                   |
| Person: | 'Wow criminology! How interesting! What is your topic?'                 |
| Author: | 'I am looking at child sexual abuse and child protection in the Church' |
| Person: | 'Oh, right . . . That's a serious topic there'.                         |

Time and time again, I would receive looks of discomfort, disgust, and at times, disapproval, on stating my research area. Of these interactions, I remember firmly two negative events, which possibly triggered the practice of emotional



labour. The first occurred when conversing with a colleague outside of our university campus' café. After hearing of my topic, they sternly questioned me, 'why would you study that?!' Shocked, I sought to defuse the situation by mentioning my aim of trying to protect children. This seemed to diffuse the situation; conversation then moved on. The second event occurred one lunch time when my colleague and I, *en route* to our university café, ran into one of her friends in the company of a small group. My colleague introduced me to the group, and vice versa. My colleague's friend inquired as to the progress of her research, and after (Ruby) shared of the positive progress, (Ruby) mentioned that I too was a PhD candidate, in the field of criminology. The aforementioned script was executed (initial interest and curiosity), but rather than expressing a look of concern or interest upon hearing of my research topic, my colleague's friend teared up, turned away from me, and thereafter, ignored me for the remainder of the group interaction.

While these reactions are not unreasonable, it was after experiencing these two encounters that I began to actively 're-package' how I would explain my research in future conversations to make it more palatable and digestible in social situations. There were a number of lines I crafted that sought to minimise any potential discomfort that may eventuate in those to whom I spoke, while also limiting the number of follow-up questions I might receive (thereby, minimising the risk of encountering discomfort). Each time I had the discussion with a different person, I would make a mental note-to-self of their reactions, adjusting the content of the introduction and tone accordingly with each new conversation. Some of the responses include, but are not limited to the following:

- 'I study child protection';
- 'I study child protection in the church';
- 'You know the Royal Commission? That kind of area';
- 'I study organisational culture in the church';
- 'I study organisation crime and deviance';
- '... the sociology of organisations';
- 'My area is in situational crime prevention';
- 'I study clerical collar crime'.

I found that shifting the focus from 'abuse' to the organisational culture component of my research was most effective in reducing listener discomfort. Conveniently, this framing also assisted in ensuring that conversations did not 'go on too long' and risk the asking of any awkward follow-up questions which could lead the conversation into areas of uncomfortable subject matter I did not wish to address. At times, I worried that my re-framing of my research was disingenuous and dishonest, although as my research began to focus more on the sociology of organisations in my second year, these concerns waned. In addition, the change of focus also allowed me to transition conversation to talk about the interconnection between culture, behaviour and organisational structures more

generally; non-sensitive content in which I have great interest on a theoretical level. On some occasions, I would explain one of the main theorists I use as an example of my work. This gave enough air time from me, so to speak, and thereafter, permitted scope to change the topic of conversation without incurring (seemingly) any interjection. In a similar way, I found that framing my research on its 'child protection' component returned mostly positive responses from people, the expression 'good on you' is an example of the common response received. This awareness of the emotional responses of others soon began to overflow into general interactions which, as the candidature progressed into darker reading material in the first year, became ever more necessary.

### Surface acting: peers and pupils

As mentioned previously, surface acting occurs when we 'put on' certain behaviours when interacting with others for their benefit, particularly enacted in compliance with the expectations of the organisation one serves. I already had some experience with surface acting prior to my doctoral candidature, having worked at a cinema chain during my college and undergraduate years, accustomed to exuberating a positive demeanour and mask discomfort when with rude or aggressive customers. As with any workplace, there are expectations as to the conduct and manners to be exhibited by those working within the university. For academics, both established and in-training, emotions and behaviour are important insofar as they interact with productivity, relationships with faculty members, and the development of rapport with, and favourable evaluations from, students (Berry and Cassidy, 2013; Ogbonna and Harris, 2004). Academics are expected to have control of their emotions and to be professional and rational in their interactions with others (Berry and Cassidy, 2013), notwithstanding their place in the tumultuous and unstable environments which universities have become (see Connell, 2013; Knights and Clarke, 2014).

During my doctorate, I was under the impression that the expectations placed upon me were to complete my PhD within a 3-year time period,<sup>2</sup> to be 'professional' and reserved among my colleagues, and to work to receive positive student evaluations from my tutoring. These expectations were formed in hearing conversations in the corridors, in receiving advice from faculty members on how to 'do well', and in talking with other PhD students. Conversations in the staff room among faculty members typically involved discussions of research being undertaken, with expressions of interest and follow-up questions, in a calm or an engaged way. While on one level, these observations of the requisite expectancies were likely the product of being one of the 'new kids on the block' and my own natural reservedness among people,<sup>3</sup> at the time, I was conscious of my self-imposed need to be mindful of what I said, an awareness which was affirmed by the aforementioned negative research introduction interactions.<sup>4</sup>

Even when on a break during lunchtime in the staffroom with my peers, the classic greeting of 'how's your day been' or 'what have you been reading today' necessitated a careful and considered response during those times when I was reading dark material. On one level, I wished to 'emotionally offload' and explain that I was not having a great day (to put it reservedly) because I was reading about abuse. My troubled emotions and anxiety triggered by the anticipating conversations I might encounter would mean that before entering a common room, I would have to remind myself to 'keep it together'. I made sure I managed my responses, removing the frown and forlorn expression from my countenance, gave energy to uphold a gentle tone of voice (not one of dismay), and made concerted efforts to respond by expressing that I was reading material on abuse, ensuring any ongoing dialogue offered information of least disclosure. I started to use shorthand to express what I was going through with – 'I have been reading some dark material today' or 'reading hard stuff today', communicated in a controlled and calm manner, and thereafter, tried to move the conversation onto more lighter subjects (namely the research focus of the person) to minimise creating discomfort, emotional unease, or personal awkwardness. On other occasions, I would mention the chapter I was working on (literature review) to mask the sensitive nature of my reading so as to not upset or unsettle my peers. I did not want to burden or trouble my peers; although however, I did not wish to be standoffish or aloof. Walking down the corridor would require similar alterations of behaviour; smile, nod, greet and move on.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout most of the years of my candidature, I undertook tutoring positions, something I thoroughly enjoyed. Though my pedagogical philosophy was orientated towards a desire to make the tutorials beneficial for my student's learning and to contribute to their success, I also felt the internal pressure every young academic feels of wanting to be liked by their students, and to represent the faculty in a positive manner. Being a good tutor was also important, I was told by some of my colleagues, because positive student evaluation was critical for when applying for lecturing positions. Student satisfaction, as well as their academic success, was to adopt the language at my previous employment, the 'key performance indicators'. With this in mind, I was aware that I could not turn up to tutorials in a melancholic or unenthusiastic mood; I had to 'leave' any negative emotions in my office, even on those days where I had been reading difficult content, irrespective of whether I wanted to be there or not (sometimes I solely wanted to run away from the department). This was in part assisted by the fact that I had to walk to a different part of the department (sometimes different buildings) to take my classes, thereby affording me some level of emotional respite as I was able to 'walk away from' and 'walk off' the dismay I was experiencing. In the instances where the walks to the classroom from the office did not suppress or remove the sad emotions, I would intentionally channel enthusiasm and warmth into my voice with my characteristic 'okay!! Let's

make a start!', intentionally smile and raise my eyebrows, and interact with the students positively.

Surface acting was also required when interacting with students individually, particularly in instances when they would ask about how my research was going, or about the nature of doctoral study. Similar to when my colleagues expressed interest, I knew that I could not burden or unsettle my students with what I was researching, nor how I felt at that moment in response to my research (wishing to withdraw and change disciplines to something not so traumatic). It would be unprofessional, inappropriate, and ultimately, unprofitable. I had to remind myself that they did not know what I had been reading nor what I was feeling. I would pause, still my mind, and respond as neutrally as I could. When asked as to my work on those times when I was most unsettled by the reading content, I would frame my response to progress (e.g. 'getting through the reading') rather than specific details, maintaining a calm and (as much as I could) disposition. On some occasions, I would admit that the research focus was at times 'hard work', but not elaborate beyond this concession. Within discussions of criminological research more broadly, I would be cautious, warning that the PhD was a mentally and emotionally challenging process. Thankfully, questions of this nature were generally asked of me in my final year of the dissertation, during which time my research had become more a study of organisational culture and behaviour, rather than the study of child sexual abuse.

## Deep acting

As mentioned earlier, deep acting involves not simply the alteration of behaviour to give the appearance of favourable emotions, but to alter one's very composition. I utilised a number of measures in efforts to regulate and change my emotions over the course of my candidature, some proving more effective than others. Initially, I employed practical means of emotional regulation, including walking around our campus (which has much greenery), listening to relaxing music as I read and worked (jazz and piano covers), drinking tea, eating chocolate, praying and reading the Bible. I would also engage in self-talk, where I would seek to actively think on positive memories ('think about the flowered hills of Wynyard'), repeat an internal monologue several times ('think happy, be happy') or try to sternly re-direct my state of mind ('pull yourself together'). While this form of deep acting was beneficial in the short term, I found that respite was short-lived and states of despair returned when taking up work again. Nevertheless, active efforts were made to suppress and regulate my emotions as to not allow myself to become melancholic. Each day at the office had as my primary objective, a *modus operandi*, to minimise the feeling and expression of negative emotion and to 'keep it together'.

Halfway through my candidature, I had recognised the changes which had impacted my worldview (towards people, the church and faith in humanity), and was conscious of how

emotionally taxing the research had become. I started to challenge these changes, utilising criminological, sociological and theological observations to do so. I started telling myself that not all people abuse children, and not all children are abused. That not all churches cover up abuse, nor are all clergy involved in criminal conduct. While some people cannot be trusted, it does not mean that I should never trust people ever again. I reminded myself of the importance of prayer as a source of peace for the Christian as taught in Philippians. I found this helpful to keep the despair and uncertainty at bay from time to time. However, while there was an object to be in control of my emotions, I was conflicted in wanting to be open and transparent about my struggles. I was tired of pretending and concealing it. I was encouraged by a friend and colleague to seek someone to talk it all out with. At first, I was reluctant for the reasons expressed earlier, but following the conclusion of my PhD, I serendipitously ran into a former colleague, who offered to be a listening ear if ever I needed it.

I took up the offer and we met for coffee one afternoon several weeks later. I was permitted to share of my experience, sorrows, frustrations (at institutions) and anxieties. There was no judgement, only compassion and understanding. This was the starting point for me to process and reconcile all that I had learned, read, felt and heard. Since that time, I have worked other contracts outside of my field (except on 1 research contract earlier in 2019), and as such have not been in child abuse research for almost 2 years. I have found that my mental health and physical health (sleep) have improved and that I feel much more balanced and optimistic. In recent weeks, I have experienced the return of my empathy, and overall, do not feel like I have to micromanage my emotions. I can now appreciate and be thankful for the resilience which I have developed through the PhD, and the ability it provides me to empathise with others who are researching emotionally difficult and sensitive subject areas.

## Closing remarks

This article has examined how emotional labour and vicarious trauma were encountered within the doctoral candidature as a product of the researching of a sensitive topic of child sexual abuse. The ways in which I tried to practice both arms of emotional labour, 'surface acting' and 'deep acting', were shown, with examples stemming from her or his experience of two particular negative interactions, and how these shaped a desire to avoid a recurrence of instigating discomfort in others, in social and teaching contexts. It seeks to highlight how the practice of emotional labour, in a way, hindered me from receiving support and healing from their vicarious trauma. This article demonstrates, I feel, a real need for incoming criminology higher degree research students to carefully consider the nature of their topic and the potential material to which they could be exposed. Incoming PhD candidates ought to consult established criminologists as to how their research affects them emotionally, of its impact on

their overall mental health, inquire as to the availability of any self-care strategies, and become acquainted with these routine and provisions. In turn, universities could introduce compulsory PhD candidate appointments with a counsellor, quarterly or annually. This could assist people such as myself, who was reluctant to seek such support and who was in a good headspace at the time of other consultations. Undergraduate programmes and research methods courses could benefit from the inclusion of dedicated discussions on issues of vicarious trauma and emotional labour to better prepare its graduates for working life, particularly those transitioning within the field of criminology and criminal justice. This could be integrated periodically throughout the degree, or in a specified unit on professional practice.

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## Notes

1. Of interest was that this sentiment was expressed by some of the participants I interviewed for my research. My experience of mistrusting others assisted to me empathise and build rapport with my participants.
2. For this was when my scholarship ran out.
3. Or perhaps more to the point, my reservedness.
4. Naturally, after 5 years in the department, I feel more at ease to express my views and emotions among my peers.
5. This is not to say I never expressed how I was feeling. There were a number of occasions where I shared the confronting nature of my research to receive support and encouragement from my peers, supervisors and loved ones.

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### Author biography

Michael A. Guerzoni (PhD, University of Tasmania) is a Criminologist at the School of Social Sciences, University of Tasmania, Australia. His research investigates 'clerical collar crime', specifically the study of clerical attitudes, practices and cultures towards child sexual abuse and child protection within Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism.